

REMARKS

I. Introduction

With the cancellation herein without prejudice of claims 1 and 15, claims 3 to 14 are pending in the present application. In view of the foregoing amendments and the following remarks, it is respectfully submitted that all of the presently pending claims are allowable, and reconsideration is respectfully requested.

II. Priority

As regards the claim for priority, Applicant maintains that the present application is entitled to a filing date of **September 12, 2000** and is continuing to seek to have a filing date of September 12, 2000 according to the present application under 37 C.F.R. § 1.6(e).

III. Objection to Claim 15

As regards the objection to claim 15 under 37 U.S.C. § 1.75(c), while Applicant does not necessarily agree with the merits of this objection, to facilitate matters, claim 15 has been amended herein without prejudice, thereby rendering moot the present objection. Withdrawal of this objection is therefore respectfully requested.

IV. Allowable Subject Matter

Applicants note with appreciation the indication of allowable subject matter contained in claim 13. In this regard, the Examiner will note that claim 13 has been rewritten herein in independent form to include all of the limitations of its respective base claim and any intervening claims. It is therefore respectfully submitted that claim 13 is in condition for immediate allowance.

In addition, claims 3 to 5, 8 to 12 and 14 have been amended herein without prejudice to depend from claim 13, and claim 6 and 7 now ultimately depend from claim 13. It is therefore respectfully submitted that claims 3 to 12 and 14 are also in condition for immediate allowance.

V. Rejection of Claims 1, 3, 9 to 12, 14 and 15 Under 35 U.S.C. § 102(a)

Claims 1, 3, 9 to 12, 14 and 15 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(a) as anticipated by U.S. Patent No. 6,430,478 ("Heckmann et al."). While Applicant does not necessarily agree with the merits of this rejection, to facilitate matters, claims 1 and 15 have been canceled herein without prejudice, and claims 3, 9 to 12 and 14 have been amended herein without prejudice to depend from claim 13, which was indicated to include allowable subject matter. It is therefore respectfully submitted that the present rejection is moot, and withdrawal of this rejection is respectfully requested.

VI. Rejection of Claims 4 and 8 Under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a)

Claims 4 and 8 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as unpatentable over the combination of Heckmann et al. and U.S. Patent No. 6,326,704 ("Breed et al."). While Applicant does not necessarily agree with the merits of this rejection, to facilitate matters, claims 4 and 8 have been amended herein without prejudice to depend from claim 13, which was indicated to include allowable subject matter. It is therefore respectfully submitted that the present rejection is moot, and withdrawal of this rejection is respectfully requested.

VII. Rejection of Claims 5 and 6 Under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a)

Claims 5 and 6 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as unpatentable over the combination of Heckmann et al. and U.S. Patent No. 4,910,658 ("Dudash"). While Applicant does not necessarily agree with the merits of the this rejection, to facilitate matters, claim 5 has been amended herein without prejudice to depend from claim 13, which was indicated to include allowable subject matter, and claim 6 now ultimately depends from claim 13. It is therefore respectfully submitted that the present rejection is moot, and withdrawal of this rejection is respectfully requested.

VIII. Rejection of Claim 7 Under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a)

Claim 7 was rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as unpatentable over the combination of Heckmann et al., Breed et al. and U.S. Patent No. 6,338,010 ("Sparks et al."). While Applicant does not necessarily agree with the merits of this rejection, to facilitate matters, claim 7 now ultimately depends from claim 13, which

was indicated to include allowable subject matter. It is therefore respectfully submitted that the present rejection is moot, and withdrawal of this rejection is respectfully requested.

IX. Conclusion

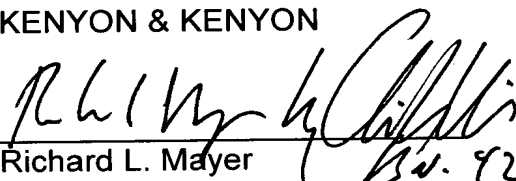
It is therefore respectfully submitted that all of the presently pending claims are allowable. All issues raised by the Examiner having been addressed, an early and favorable action on the merits is earnestly solicited.

Respectfully submitted,

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